The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Western Sahara

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2016/355)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/401, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/2016/355, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara.

The Council is ready to proceed to a vote on the draft resolutions before it. I shall first put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America

Against:

Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

Abstaining:

Angola, New Zealand and Russian Federation

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There were 10 votes in favour, 2 votes against and 3 abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2285 (2016).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Ms. Power (United States of America): The United States supports the Security Council's adoption of the resolution 2285 (2016), which renews for another year the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). MINURSO plays an indispensable role in preserving and ensuring safety and security in Western Sahara and must continue to do so until a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara is achieved. We thank members of the Security Council and those in the Group of Friends of Western Sahara for their support in concluding the negotiations on the MINURSO mandate renewal and adopting the resolution today in advance of the mandate's expiration tomorrow.

As we all know, this year's mandate renewal was challenging and contentious. That is an understatement. It is taking place against a backdrop of significant uncertainty for the Mission, with the removal of civilian staff, including the Mission's political component, rendering MINURSO incapable of fully functioning and fulfilling its mandate. Civilian staff provide essential support of the Mission's operations. Under-Secretary-General Ladsous has made abundantly clear that the current conditions in which MINURSO is striving to do its job are unsustainable.

It is important that Morocco and the United Nations have a constructive relationship. In fact, it is absolutely necessary if the United Nations-led process, which we all support, is to bring about a peaceful, sustainable and mutually agreed solution to the conflict in Western Sahara. To that end, it is critically important that continued engagement between Morocco and the United Nations leads to resolving the challenges facing MINURSO and to restoring MINURSO to full functionality.

The policy of the United States regarding Western Sahara has not changed. We consider Morocco's autonomy plan serious, realistic and credible. It represents a potential approach that could satisfy the self-determination aspirations of the people of Western Sahara. At the same time, the United States believes that we — and by "we" I mean not only our Government but also the Security Council — have a responsibility to protect the integrity of the mandates that we authorize and to ensure the effectiveness and safety of peacekeeping personnel worldwide, including those serving in MINURSO.

The Security Council must respond swiftly and proactively in any situation in which a Government requires the staff from a United Nations peacekeeping mission immediately to depart. Our goal has been and remains securing a return to the full functionality of

the MINURSO mission as soon as possible so that it can fulfil the mandate given to it by the Council. We consider the civilian component, including the political reporting function, to be a crucial part of that mandate. Resolution 2285 (2016) provides an important signal from the Council and a realistic path to achieving that necessary return to full functionality.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): It was with great disappointment that New Zealand abstained today. This was the first time during our current term on the Security Council that we have not supported the adoption of a Council resolution.

It should not have been like this. It should have been possible to maintain the tradition of consensus on this important issue. We thank the United States for its determined efforts to that end. But consensus implies a meeting of minds and common commitment. Those elements have not been a feature of the preparation of this resolution. Rather, we have seen, again, the preparation of a text in a Group of Friends whose composition does not reflect the span of perspectives that exists on the Western Sahara, neither among the protagonists on this issue nor on the Council, and an unwillingness to accept modest amendments on a text that deals with an issue of importance to the whole Council, indeed to the whole United Nations membership.

In New Zealand's view, today's resolution falls short of what the Council should be doing to discharge properly its responsibilities on the Western Sahara. A resolution that truly reflected the gravity of the current crisis over the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the magnitude of the challenge inherent in the full discharge of the MINURSO mandate should have done the following things.

First, the resolution should have stated the reality that the expulsion of the civilian component had seriously compromised the Mission and its ability to discharge its mandate. These facts have been repeatedly stated by the Secretariat in its briefings to the Council over the past month.

Secondly, the resolution should have called for the immediate restoration of the full functionality of the Mission and provided for the Council's continued engagement to ensure that a return to full functionality is achieved in the near future.

Thirdly, on the core political direction of the mandate, the Council should have taken up the sensible and appropriate advice of the Secretary-General, reiterated in this week's consultations by the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, Christopher Ross, and Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous, that the time had come to engage in serious negotiations without preconditions and in good faith to reach a mutually acceptable political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. And that mutually acceptable solution should include the resolution of the dispute over the status of Western Sahara, including through agreement on the nature and form of the exercise of self-determination. As Mr. Ladsous told the Council quite categorically on Wednesday (see S/PV.7679), we can no longer procrastinate in addressing these deep underlying issues.

MINURSO fulfils an essential function, and its inability to fulfil its mandate risks fuelling further instability in an already troubled region. The Council must provide the full weight of its support to the Mission. Notwithstanding our abstention, New Zealand reiterates its full support for MINURSO, its mandate, the Secretary-General, his Personal Envoy and Special Representative.

Finally, in our view, every member of the Security Council must reflect on the broader implications of the current episode over MINURSO's deployment for the Council's stewardship of its peacekeeping operations globally.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela voted against the adoption of resolution 2285 (2016), on the renewal of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), for substantive reasons and of procedure, which have troubled us deeply. This entire process has been characterized by a terrible lack of transparency, which made it difficult for us to reach the shared goal of consensus. The results of the voting this morning constitute a clear message that a significant number of the members of the Security Council see that there is a clear fracture in the different positions held by Council members on how to resolve this issue.

First of all, I should like to point out that the discussion of this issue was preceded by a series of events that shaped the way this matter would be

dealt with in the Security Council. Let us recall that, on 18 November 2015, we asked for an "Any other business" discussion in the Security Council in the face of the serious difficulties that Ambassador Christopher Ross, Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, had to confront in order to carry out his diplomatic work in the territory. At that time, Venezuela warned against that attempt on the part of one of the parties — the Moroccan side — to impede the work of the Special Envoy. But it was not possible to count on the backing of the Security Council in the light of our concern, which foresaw a conflicting situation with regard to the Council's mandate. Similarly, when the Secretary-General tried on various occasions to visit Western Sahara, he faced many obstacles by the Government of Morocco, which set preconditions and reservations. My country asked the Council for us to express our support for the Secretary-General in carrying out his duties. However, it was not possible to come up with any elements, not even for the press, on the Council's support for the Secretary-General. Finally, following the Secretary-General's visit to the Western Sahara territories, and given that the terrible, unprecedented number of impediments he encountered in carrying out his duties, Venezuela once again asked for a Security Council analysis of the situation and a statement from the Council, which were also not possible. In other words, the Council was not able to anticipate a situation such as the one produced later on by Morocco's expulsion of the civilian component of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

In that regard, the Security Council has been subject to a great deal of pressure on the part of some of its members, as well as an incredible amount of pressure by Morocco, so that we are not able to meet the responsibilities entrusted to us to prevent conflicts such as the latent one in the region of Western Sahara. Following the expulsion of the MINURSO civilian component, already a month ago, the Council was also incapable of expressing its position in rejection of this unprecedented situation precipitated by a country that ought to embrace, protect and facilitate the fulfilment of the mandate of a peacekeeping mission.

Previously, we also expressed our deep annoyance and disappointment that it was not possible, as is the practice in other cases, for the closed consultations on this issue to be preceded by a briefing to the Security Council, which would have made it possible to hear, here in Hall and before the entire international community, the views of the Head of MINURSO, Ms. Kim Bolduc, and of Special Envoy Christopher Ross, as well as those of former President Joaquim Chissano, Special Envoy of the African Union for Western Sahara. Let us recall that last year when we voted on and adopted the resolution on MINURSO (see S/PV.7435) we asked that former President Chissano, who is a hero of Africa and decolonization processes, could take the floor. That was not possible, however, because, once again, members of the Security Council blocked it.

All of this is to say that this process was preceded by a host of impediments, irregularities and situations that have served to create a state of absolute lack of transparency. Most serious of all, as we see it, is that with so many actions the effort has been to change de facto — as has happened on the ground — the mandate of MINURSO. Without its civilian component, MINURSO simply cannot take the necessary steps to carry out the referendum, which is in fact the mandate the Security Council established. We should remember that carrying out a referendum was what allowed for agreement between the parties and for the establishment of the ceasefire. The parties put their trust in the Security Council, and the ceasefire has been in place for 25 years to lead to a referendum. That solution seems increasingly far off, given the intention, in an arbitrary way and counter to the mandate of the Council, to forget about the referendum as the solution for the Sahraoui people.

Against that backdrop of clear contempt, last Wednesday at 3.30 p.m. we were presented with a draft resolution (see S/2016/401). Apparently, it had been discussed in the Group of Friends. However, the rest of the members did not have access to it. Thanks to the efforts made by the President of the Security Council, it was possible to extend its consideration for an additional day. Yesterday was held the first and only substantive meeting to discuss the matter, which did not in fact lead to achieving consensus.

Moreover, the text before us, which was adopted at resolution 2285 (2016), does not address the legitimate concerns and proposals of several of the countries with an interest in this important issue, including Venezuela. The resolution ignores the current situation on the ground, which has been the subject of various closed meetings of the Council and which has produced deep concern among Member States. It is not enough to bemoan the situation with MINURSO, as the resolution does; rather, it should have emphatically condemned

Morocco's unilateral expulsion of international staff and demanded their immediate return. A Security Council document that is not capable of stating clearly who expelled MINURSO's civilian contingent, or why, is a text that aims to intentionally ignore the reality in Western Sahara. We believe we have lost an outstanding opportunity for the Security Council to express, via this resolution, its absolute disagreement with the expulsion of MINURSO's civilian personnel, which constitutes not just a harsh blow for the political negotiating process but also a lamentable precedent for the international community.

In addition, our attention was starkly drawn to the fact that the resolution does include any measures to ensure the return of MINURSO's civilian staff to the area of operations. Regrettably, we must state that had this involved a weaker country without the right allies in the Council, the Security Council would not have hesitated to impose severe sanctions, as it often does with many brotherly African countries. We are sending a message to the international community that is possible to violate the decisions of the Security Council without consequence for Member States. It was not even possible to include a provision in the resolution aimed at setting a 30-day period for a periodic consideration of this issue by the Security Council. As provided by the resolution adopted, it will be 90 days before the Secretary-General, who by then will be about to be replaced, informs the Security Council as to what has happened with MINURO's civilian staff. And it should be noted that will be only to "inform", and no concrete actions are foreseen. This seems paradoxical: MINURSO's entire essential component having been expelled, in just 72 hours, the Council does not have the will to meet once per month to look into developments in the situation on the ground. What is more, the text of the resolution does not even take up the just aspirations of the Sahraoui population, which for more than 40 years have lived in a territory under a pending decolonization process, or the existing concerns with regard to protecting the human rights in Western Sahara while taking into account the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2016/355).

We believe that the status quo with regard to Western Sahara is already unsustainable. It is for that reason that the ambiguous language of the resolution sends a negative signal and reflects a disheartening message. We should not forget that MINURSO's mandate was first set out in resolution 690 (1991), which urged the Mission to make every effort to pursue a just and lasting solution by undertaking a referendum on the self-determination of the Sahraoui people. It is that people who should choose between autonomy and independence.

It is essential that, in dealing with the issue of Western Sahara, the Council should act with authority, determination and transparency, and in accordance with international law. We are facing a situation in which the Security Council is at risk of failing to fulfil its mandate, and it will now be very difficult to comply with Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations, which confers the primary responsibility on the Council for the maintenance of international peace and security on behalf of Member States. In the past, there have been serious deficiencies in that regard, including cases where the permanent members of the Council have violated the Charter. Such violations of the international rule of law must end and the Council must live up to its responsibilities.

If the people of Western Sahara are not guaranteed the right to determine their own future and the Kingdom of Morocco is allowed to continue to occupy the territory, it will be the first time since the founding of the United Nations that the international community accepts de facto that a non-self-governing territory, recognized as being in the decolonization process, would be forcibly annexed without the people's consent.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela recognizes and supports MINURSO's important role in overseeing the ceasefire, reducing the threat of mines and unexploded ordnance and promoting confidence-building measures between the parties with the aim of holding the referendum, which represents its principal mandate. Our vote against today's resolution in no way means that we deny the significant efforts being made by the civilian and other personnel of MINURSO, who even in extremely difficult conditions are trying to do their jobs on the ground. Nor are we ignoring the Secretary-General's efforts to mediate and facilitate, and he has our full support in that regard, as does his Personal Envoy Christopher Ross and Ms. Bolduc, in holding direct talks in good faith between the parties to the conflict. MINURSO should continue to cooperate and to immediately re-establish its operational and political capacities in order to ensure that it can fulfil its mandate, so as to deal with the difficult situation facing displaced and separated Sahrawi families and

enable them to live in dignity on the land that belongs to them, in their own country.

The Security Council's lack of action on such an urgent and serious issue is unacceptable. We have said that to other Council members in our closed meetings, and we continue to condemn it and to refuse to validate it. The situation regarding Morocco's treatment of MINURSO and its mandate is completely irregular and has been validated in a weak Security Council resolution, which we reject. With it, we have lost an opportunity to send a strong message to the parties demanding the restoration of MINURSO's civilian personnel, whose work we support and appreciate as the only means ensuring the maintenance of the ceasefire over the past 25 years and more. We also demand that negotiations be resumed with a view to holding a referendum on self-determination.

Lastly, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela regrets the fact that we have lost an opportunity to reassert the Security Council's responsibility to work for a just solution when the people of Western Sahara have been waiting for more than 40 years to be able to overcome their situation, that of the last remaining colony on our brotherly continent of Africa.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to applaud the persistent efforts of the United States, which worked tirelessly to ensure that resolution 2285 (2016), which we just adopted, represented a response adequate to the difficulties we have witnessed in the past few weeks in relations between Morocco and the Secretary-General regarding the issue of Western Sahara and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). The goal, after all, is to create the conditions conducive to restoring an atmosphere conducive to calm and to the proper functioning of MINURSO, to which we are all very committed.

Thanks to the decision we have just taken, MINURSO's mandate has been renewed for a year and for the entire Mission. That could be crucial, since the Mission does essential work on the ground, and I would like to commend the work of the Ms. Kim Bolduc, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Mr. Christopher Ross, Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, and the Secretary-General himself. They have all contributed within their areas of responsibility to ensuring that the ceasefire is maintained and to advancing the situation towards a settlement of the dispute, which is so necessary to the people of Western Sahara and to the stability, security and prosperity of the region, which is in any case facing major security challenges. As a result, France will continue to support the political process, led by the United Nations and aimed at making progress towards a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, in accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

On the substance of the issues, France believes that the plan for autonomy presented by Morocco in 2007 represents a serious and credible basis for a negotiated solution. Now that the mandate has been renewed, steps must be taken as quickly as possible to enable MINURSO's mandate to be fully implemented, and specifically resolving the issue of its personnel, particularly the civilian component, which in the past few weeks has been the subject of discussion between Morocco and the Secretary-General. For its part, the Council should continue to follow the issue actively and to work to establish a climate of trust and positive momentum conducive to political negotiations, the responsibility for which lies in the United Nations with the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy. France will continue to support every effort in that regard.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain voted in favour of today's resolution 2285 (2016). We heartily commend the efforts of the United States as facilitator and other members of the Security Council for their work. We are well aware of the difficulties those negotiations presented. Spain would have preferred that this year we could have once again adopted the resolution unanimously in a demonstration of the Council's unity. Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

Among other things, the role of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) is crucial to maintaining peace and security in a strategic region. We believe that the text of the resolution succeeded in achieving a balance between the annual renewal, which in our view provides necessary institutional stability, and appropriate follow-up on the part of the Security Council to ensure that MINURSO is restored to full functionality and is in a condition to comply fully with its mandate, as called for in the resolution we have just adopted. It is time to overcome this crisis. We encourage Morocco and the Secretariat to intensify their contact and efforts.

Beyond today's mandate renewal, Spain believes that the international community must focus its efforts on helping the parties to reach a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that calls for the free self-determination of the people of Western Sahara within a framework of provisions in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of resolution 2285 (2016). Although the past few weeks have been regrettable, today's resolution must mark a turning point in the urgent efforts to bring the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) back to full functionality. MINURSO's work, including its vital civilian component and political reporting function, is critical to the stability of Western Sahara. Recent events have rendered it unable to deliver on its mandate over the past six weeks.

Let me be clear. The Council has the responsibility to protect the integrity of its peacekeeping missions and to preserve their ability to implement their mandate. MINURSO is no exception. In that regard, resolution 2285 (2016), adopted today, contains two important elements. First, it emphasizes the urgent need for MINURSO to be returned to full functionality. Secondly, it contains a review mechanism in the form of a briefing by the Secretary-General within the next 90 days to ensure that that reinforcement happens and an undertaking for the Council to consider how best to achieve that outcome, if it is not fully functional. In the meantime, we urge the resumption of productive talks between Morocco and the United Nations, so that the Council can be satisfied that MINURSO is again fully functional.

Our collective focus must also return to the United Nations process and to finding a lasting and mutually acceptable political solution for Western Sahara, one that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. The United Kingdom position on that issue remains the same. The United Nations process will continue to have our full support.

As Western Sahara illustrates, there are too many intractable long-running disputes on the agenda of the Council, so today we urge the parties to engage constructively with each other and with the United Nations process, so that together we can find a solution and settle the question of Western Sahara once and for all. Doing so is not only of the utmost importance to the Western Saharan refugees, who continue to suffer from the protracted dispute, but also for the security and economic prosperity of all countries and all peoples in the Maghreb region.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): Ukraine voted today in favour of resolution 2285 (2016), given its conviction that the Council has to ensure that the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) continues to conduct its operations, which are vital for peace, stability and security in Western Sahara. The resolution adopted is important, not just for the sake of the continued work of the Mission but for creating the proper environment and providing the necessary impetus for a relaunch of the political process so as to achieve a lasting and mutually acceptable solution.

At the same time, we fully share the concerns, and even the frustrations, of some Council members about the current circumstances in which the Mission has to operate. We therefore emphasize the urgent need to restore the Mission's full capabilities, including political functions, as soon as possible.

We commend the Group of Friends of Western Sahara for their efforts aimed at resolving the current situation. Ukraine calls upon all parties to cooperate in good faith with the operations of MINURSO and to take the necessary steps to ensure the security, unhindered movement and full freedom of access of the United Nations and associated personnel in carrying out their mandate in conformity with existing agreements.

In conclusion, I would like to express Ukraine's support for the United Nations efforts to find a solution to the issue of Western Sahara.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I thank the Permanent Mission of the United States for preparing the text of resolution 2285 (2016), given the delicate circumstances involved. Malaysia voted in favour of the resolution, which renews the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for another year and emphasizes the urgent need for MINURSO to return to full functionality, as we are mindful of the importance of preserving the integrity and ability of MINURSO to fulfil its mandate as stipulated in the Council's resolutions.

The ongoing operation of MINURSO is indispensable to stability and security in Western Sahara. We reiterate Malaysia's principal positions on

the need to resolve conflicts through peaceful means, as well as our firm commitment and support for United Nations peacekeeping operations as a tool for the maintenance of international peace and security. We would like to underscore Malaysia's continued support for the efforts of MINURSO, as well as that of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, Ambassador Christopher Ross, to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, which will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as on respect for the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. In that regard, we would like to emphasize the importance of full cooperation by all parties with the efforts of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General and with MINURSO in order to enable them to perform the tasks mandated by the Council.

Lastly, we would have hoped for a broad, inclusive and transparent consultation process on draft resolutions that would take into consideration the legitimate concerns and views of all Council members. Sufficient time for consultations would enable us to seek clarity on the issues at hand, consider sensible options and determine the guiding principles for consensus-building measures.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): Let me begin by emphasizing the critical role that the United Nations plays under the leadership of the Secretary-General, his Personal Envoy and the Head of the Mission in maintaining peace and security, as well as in promoting mutual trust and achieving a political solution in Western Sahara.

On the ground, the personnel of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) carry out important tasks mandated by the Council. MINURSO has managed to continue its operations with a limited capacity after the departure of 73 of its personnel on 20 March. That continuity has been possible solely owing to the dedicated efforts of the remaining personnel of MINURSO, whom I wish to commend.

On 24 March, members of the Security Council expressed serious concerns about the developments related to Western Sahara and therefore stressed the importance of addressing the situation, so that MINURSO might resume its full capacity to carry out its mandate. Peacekeeping operations and other missions are deployed by the Council to carry out critical tasks around the world to maintain international peace and security. Given that the mandate of MINURSO was due to expire on 30 April, many Member States, including Japan, made strenuous efforts to address the situation. It was a matter of priority for the Council to extend the mandate of the Mission by tomorrow. At the same time, it was also necessary to ensure that MINURSO returns to full functionality as a matter of urgency.

Japan voted in favour of resolution 2285 (2016) because it provides the answer to those priorities. I would also like to express our appreciation to the penholder, the United States, for its efforts in preparing the draft resolution. A return to full functionality should, in our view, include on-site political reporting capabilities, so that MINURSO will be able to fully carry out its mandate contained in the relevant Council resolution, including the one we have just adopted.

In the resolution, the Council requests to be briefed within 90 days, but that does not mean that we should wait 90 days to take action. Rather, in the light of the urgency, efforts should be made to recover full functionality in an expeditious manner. It is the responsibility of the Council to ensure that its resolutions, including this one, are fully implemented. We look to the Kingdom of Morocco, an important member of the international community, to continue its utmost efforts to improve the situation in cooperation with the United Nations. Japan stands ready to assist such efforts in any way it can.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the need for lasting adherence to the ceasefire and the importance of the continuation of negotiations towards a long overdue political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt voted in favour of resolution 2285 (2016), extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for a full year, convinced as we are of the importance of the role played by United Nations peacekeeping forces in maintaining international peace and security, and our role as a troop-contributor.

The region is facing several challenges that threaten its people and threaten the existence of the States in the region. Those are circumstances that should not be further aggravated. In that context, since last March, Egypt has called for a calm and balanced approach.

That is the only way that the Council will be able to deal with this matter. That position was reflected during the negotiations on resolution 2285 (2016), adopted today. The contents of the resolution are drafted well and in a very careful and precise manner in order to convey the situation in Western Sahara, and with a view to settling the crisis there in accordance with the relevant Council resolutions.

After having adopted this very important resolution, which draws on lessons from past experience, and after having prevented what could have become a large-scale crisis, we must examine in a thorough and in-depth manner the events that were set in motion on 7 March, in addition to the events that followed and their causes. We must learn lessons from the past in order to maintain international peace and security. Furthermore, the main lesson of the events of the past two months is the danger of an explosion of conflicts that have been left unresolved. We must reiterate the importance of reaching, within the framework of Security Council resolutions, a political settlement agreed to by all with regard to Western Sahara.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): The Security Council has just adopted resolution 2285 (2016) to renew the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Angola abstained in the voting for a number of reasons that we would like to outline, the first of which was a desire to reaffirm the expression of our political will and hope that it is never too late to correct mistakes. Angola, as a member of the African Union, is ready and remains fully engaged with regard to the search for a just solution for the people of Western Sahara. We regret that every proposed amendment to the draft, which were presented by a number of Member States, including Angola, met outright rejection. Indeed, there was no meaningful negotiation on this text. We made constructive proposals that, in our view, addressed the legitimate concerns of the international community but were not given due consideration.

Although we welcome the request for briefings by the Secretary-General at least twice a year, we deem it imperative to shorten the reporting period. The Security Council needs to be informed and constantly updated on developments on the ground. We believe that the current yearly report does not fit such a need, although the period has been reduced. The situation is too volatile, and the Council needs to remain seized. It must never miss the opportunity to act, as it did recently when unfortunate decisions that changed the operation of the Mission were made. The decisions made last month by one of the parties to the controversy have entailed serious consequences for the Mission's ability to fulfil its mandate. The decision on staffing has created a dangerous precedent for peacekeeping missions around the world, and for the very reputation of the Security Council, which is responsible for their deployment and management. The resolution adopted fails to address the situation with the seriousness and engagement that it deserves. One of our colleagues this morning referred to it as "significantly uncertain".

We would like to underscore that the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara, dated 19 April, states that

> "[w]ithout a suitable and fully staffed international civilian component, the Mission cannot fulfil a core component of its functions" [and that] "the expulsion of most of the MINURSO international civilian component ... can be expected to be exploited by ... radical elements" (*S/2016/355, para. 93*).

And the Council is quite aware of the fact that, unfortunately, those radical elements are very much present in the region. The resolution should have requested the immediate return of MINURSO to full functionality without preconditions. That is one of the main reasons why we abstained in the voting earlier.

We believe that the Security Council should assume its responsibilities and address the failing parties by imposing appropriate measures as it has done in similar cases before. Angola cannot support the adoption of what we consider to be a biased resolution that validates double standards. The resolution should also have reaffirmed the mandate of MINURSO, including its political mandate, which is to assist the parties to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution that will provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. We believe that MINURSO should also be given a human rights mandate to monitor the human rights situation in the territory, which is of great concern to members of the Council.

In conclusion, Angola reaffirms its commitment to continuing its constructive engagement in order to support MINURSO's activities, with its full capacity, as mandated by the Security Council and in accordance

with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which was set up by the Security Council and includes Russian military observers, has played an extremely important stabilizing role. Its work has been effective and has allowed for the establishment of an environment that is conducive to advancement towards a political settlement of this long-standing issue, based on Security Council resolutions.

The relevant Security Council resolutions clearly set out that the form of the settlement must be acceptable to the parties, Morocco and the Polisario Front, and must provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara within the context of the procedures and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Monitoring the ceasefire is one of the key roles of the Mission; however, the political component is also of considerable importance. Since no one has changed the final goal, which was established through international decisions, the parties must realize that, without United Nations assistance, the difficult path towards a mutually acceptable settlement is unthinkable.

The situation concerning the Mission is, however, a cause for deep concern. We know that specific steps are being taken in order to diffuse the tension, but they have not yielded the hoped-for result. The actions that have been taken with regard to United Nations personnel may negatively impact the situation in the region, and what is very important for international peace and security, namely, United Nations peacekeeping efforts, has been made more difficult to implement. The confrontational approach must be replaced by a responsible one based on unconditional respect for Security Council decisions. The work of the Mission must be fully re-established. We need to bring all staff back to their responsibilities as soon as possible, so that they can fulfil unhindered the functions that have been assigned to them.

In our view, the text of resolution 2285 (2016), which extends the mandate of the Mission for the next 12 months suffers from substantive shortcomings. We were therefore unable to vote in favour of the resolution. The ninth preambular paragraph mentions serious and credible efforts to move the process forward towards a solution. Everyone who is aware of the current situation will say that that text has been outpaced by events and sends the wrong political message.

However, we would particularly stress the fact that we appreciate our good and historically friendly relationships with countries in the region, including, of course, Morocco, which are based on their multidimensional plans for development and respect and concern for each other's interests. Concerning the artificially exacerbated situation with regard to MINURSO, we should not forget the key task, which is to get a dialogue going between the parties, and that is of fundamental importance to efforts to support security and stability in that part of the world. In that regard, a positive role could be played by the African Union.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): With Senegal's vote in favour, the Security Council has just adopted resolution 2285 (2016), renewing for a period of 12 months the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, which was to expire tomorrow on 30 April. It is assuredly a balanced resolution, for which the delegation of Senegal would like to commend the leadership demonstrated by the United States of America in conducting the consultations. It is the result of the constructive spirit with which the members of the Council participated in the process, allowing for the achievement of a text this morning that entertains hope with regard to the political process, the only way to resolve the issue.

Bearing in mind the important role played by the United Nations in that process, as well as the equally constructive stance taken by Morocco, I would like pay tribute to them and encourage all efforts being made to enhance cooperation between the Secretariat and the Kingdom of Morocco. The dialogue was never broken between the parties, thanks, in particular, to the discrete diplomacy that has been deployed, as well as the bilateral contacts. The delegation of Senegal therefore takes this opportunity to highlight that the self-governance that Morocco has been proposing since 2007 appears to be positive, serious and realistic. It can encourage the pursuit of a climate of cooperation between the parties for a just, long-lasting and mutually acceptable solution in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Because this is one of the few occasions on which the subject of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) has been addressed in

an open meeting of the Security Council, Uruguay, as a non-permanent member elected by the General Assembly to the Security Council and a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, feelsduty-bound to relay to the other Member States much of what has been already expressed and presented in the various consultations of the Security Council and on which resolution 2285 (2016) is based.

Let us be very clear. Uruguay is in favour of maintaining the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, on the condition that it is able to fulfil each and every one of the components of the mandate set out by the Security Council. Uruguay has a long history of participating in peacekeeping operations under United Nations auspices. Currently, we have 1,500 troops deployed, mostly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti. Troop-contributing countries come to an agreement with the United Nations on a set of documents that serve as mutual guarantees with regard to the mandates of missions, standards and discipline, which are applicable at all times. Those documents are commonly known by their English names: status-of-forces agreement, status-of-mission agreement and rules of engagement, and so on.

The mandates provided by the Security Council and the entire set of documents that I have mentioned constitute the contract that binds troop-contributing countries with the United Nations. Furthermore, they are the guarantees that protect the personnel whom a country voluntarily contributes to a peacekeeping operation. Accordingly, it is obvious that that set of commitments can be modified only by whomever has the international legitimacy to do so. In this case, that is the Security Council.

The Security Council today adopted resolution 2285 (2016) on the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara. The text was presented to the members of the Security Council in an initial version on Wednesday afternoon — Ambassador Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño of Venezuela pointed out that it was at 3.30 p.m. — and the draft of the resolution that we adopted today was presented at 6.45 p.m. yesterday. The resolution was drafted in consultations with a very small and self-convened group called the Group of Friends on Western Sahara. Although we feel that we are friends of the Western Sahara, apparently we are not qualified to be members of that select group.

Owing to the content and structure of the resolution, the text is almost identical to the resolutions adopted by the Council in previous years. In other words, it is business as usual. My delegation believes, however, that we are very far from business as usual, because on 16 March, the Permanent Mission of Morocco conveyed to the Executive Office of the Secretary-General a list of 84 members of the international civilian component of the MINURSO and the African Union who had to leave Morocco within three days' time. It was a document — an objective fact — and we have all read it. That sovereign yet unilateral decision taken by Morocco immediately altered and radically changed the conditions of the operationality of the Mission provided for by the Security Council, which today barely manages to maintain its self-sufficiency — far from complying with the mandate with which it was entrusted.

We all know that the sovereign decisions adopted by Morocco indicate that their authorities felt deeply offended by the statements made by the Secretary-General during his visit to the region in early March. For my delegation, the question of offenses must be resolved directly between the person who was offended and the offender. Each party will decide on the actions that they wish to take with regard to one another, but between themselves, without affecting a third party.

My delegation deems that the sovereign measures adopted by Morocco have no connection to the person whom that country considers to be the offender — the Secretary-General — but are rather aimed at the entire Organization that he represents. The expulsion of the international civilian component of MINURSO from Western Sahara has nothing to do with any offence that the Secretary-General could have committed. It has everything to do with the mandate that the Security Council established in a timely manner and with the functionality of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara.

That is why we were very surprised, in reading the text of the resolution, not to find a single reference to the fact that a decision has disrupted the operation of an important peacekeeping mission. I should like to read out the twenty-third preambular paragraph of resolution 2285 (2016), which consists of the following curious statement:

> "Regretting that MINURSO's ability to fully carry out its mandate has been affected as the

majority of its civilian component, including political personnel, cannot perform their duties within MINURSO's area of operations."

The Security Council does not explain in any way how the inability of the Mission to carry out its tasks might have arisen. We have no indication as to whether a lack of means or equipment or some impediment on the part of the personnel are responsible, or if a serious misfortune — a dengue or chikungunya virus infection — arose to prevent that from happening.

Following the text, we see that in operative paragraph 1, despite the fact that the Council admits that MINURSO is prevented from carrying out its tasks, it has decided to extend it until 30 April 2017. Paragraph 2 emphasizes the urgent need for MINURSO to return to full functionality. In regard to a Mission that cannot comply with its tasks for unknown reasons and whose mandate has been extended, the Council points to the urgent need for it to return to full functionality. Frankly, we have no idea what the phrase "full functionality" means. It is clear that it is a comparative term and that "full" will depend on the parametre that it is measured against. For example, if tomorrow we compare the functionality of MINURSO to how MINURSO is functioning today, clearly MINURSO will have reached full functionality. Perhaps the provision was intended to imply that "full functionality" was the state of operation enjoyed by the Mission on 15 March, before the adoption of the sovereign measure taken by Morocco, but for one reason or another that is not specified in that sentence.

Finally, I would like to refer paragraph 3, which

> "Requests the Secretary-General to brief the Council within 90 days on whether MINURSO has returned to full functionality and expresses its intention, if MINURSO has not achieved full functionality, to consider how best to facilitate the achievement of this goal".

I would like to point out several issues in that regard.

First, the Council provides no guideline on what to do or how to ensure that MINURSO recovers full functionality, nor does it point who is responsible for leading the process of the return to a normal situation. I admit there is some logic to the Security Council's inability to explain why functionality was lost or what it means by "return to full functionality", and that it is therefore unable to define how and who has to do it.

Secondly, the timeline for a return to full functionality — three months — is too long. We all remember Murphy's Law. Murphy has a special chapter on "committology" that is guided by the principle that every committee tends to use to the maximum the period entrusted to it to carry out its task. Murphy was an optimist. In that regard, there is also a certain logic to this three-month period. The Council does not know why, how or who has to carry out this task, so it is best to provide for as long a deadline as possible.

Thirdly, it is not very common, but the Council itself is expressing serious doubts as to whether the Mission can return to full functionality within three months. If that were not the case, the Council would not need to reaffirm its intention to consider how best to facilitate achievement of that goal.

With respect to the phrase "expresses its intention", allow me to make a frank comment. We are all familiar with the variety of tones used in diplomacy to refer to the degrees of commitment that we are willing to make. We have all on different occasions used different expressions — I will say them in English since that is the language in which we usually draft — such as "shall", "will", "would", "should", "may", "might", "ought to" and so on, to express our intentions. The phrase that represents one of the most tenuous types of commitment on the spectrum is the term "best endeavours". Thus, if it is decided after three months that we have not returned to full functionality, the most that the Council is committed to is "to consider how best to facilitate achievement of this goal". I have to ask — would any of us sign a contract to sell our house to a buyer who expresses the intention of paying us but does not even set a price?

After so much discussion, it would have been far simpler to include a provision stipulating something along the line of "urges the Government of Morocco to facilitate forthwith the full recomposition of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara", such that it could fully carry out the mandate established by the Security Council. As some of my colleagues have already pointed out, we were unable to rupture the iron-clad content of the text that is presented here.

I reiterate that Uruguay is in favour of maintaining a United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara which that is able to comply with every element of its mandate, as defined by the Security

Council. Our delegation believes that resolution 2285 (2016) does not endow the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara with the tools or guarantees necessary to comply with its mandate. That is why my Government felt obligated to vote against the resolution.

In conclusion, Uruguay endorses and supports the actions of the entire Secretariat, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Western Sahara, and the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara. We unreservedly support the work undertaken by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Moreover, as a troop-contributing country in many missions, we pay tribute to all MINURSO personnel, who face ongoing and ever-greater difficulties.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

The Council just adopted resolution 2285 (2016), on extending the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), in which it decides to do so for one year and emphasizes the urgent need for the Mission to return to full functionality expeditiously. It also reflects the will and resolve of the Security Council to push for a political solution to the question of Western Sahara and maintain MINURSO's mandate.

China supports the extension of MINURSO to allow it to resume its full capacity to implement the Council's resolution at the earliest. It is our hope that the Mission will continue to play an important role in the implementation of the Council's resolutions and in stabilizing the situation in Western Sahara.

China has maintained a consistent position on the question of Western Sahara. We will continue to uphold a fair and objective position on the matter and support the United Nations in its efforts to push for a political solution to the question. We encourage both parties, based on the relevant Council resolutions, to seek a fair, long-lasting solution which is acceptable to both sides through negotiations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. Before adjourning the meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of April, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of China to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their respective staff and to the secretariat of the Council for all the support they have given to us.

It has been a busy month and one in which we have reached consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone and without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all of the relevant conference service officers. As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the Egyptian delegation good luck in the month of May.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.